

WI-428  
William J. Downing House  
Salisbury  
Private

c. 1896

Lumber merchant William J. Downing financed construction of this intricately detailed Victorian house around 1895-96, shortly after acquiring nearly a half-acre lot from the Gordon H. Toadvine estate trustee, L. Ernest Williams. The Downing house reflects well the architectural animation common to the late nineteenth century. The tee-shaped house has a lively Park Avenue facade with a projecting two-and-a-half story pavilion that extends farther forward with a two-story bay. The main elevation is accentuated with an enriched turned baluster porch that wraps around the uneven main facade and extends across the south side to a two-story office addition. Multiple gables and dormers, sheathed with fishscale shingles, feature decorative brackets and multi-paned windows which enhances the visual exterior interest.

In addition to his lumber business, William J. Downing took advantage of his access to reasonably priced building products and speculated in the construction of rental housing. A short notice in the *Salisbury Advertiser* on October 3, 1896 announced:

*Mr. W. J. Downing has bought of Mr. Randolph Humphreys the remainder of the Morris land lying between Division and Gay streets, back of the property of Mrs. S. A. Graham. Mr. Downing expects to put tenant houses on the lots.*

Downing family ownership of the Park Avenue property continued until 1956,

when it was purchased by Elmer F. and Eunice H. Ruark. Elmer F. Ruark served as a mayor of Salisbury for eight years between 1974 and 1982.

## MARYLAND HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN INFORMATION

RESOURCE NAME: William J. Downing House

MHT INVENTORY NUMBER: WI-428

## MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN DATA

1. Historic Period Theme(s): Architecture
2. Geographic Orientation: Eastern Shore
3. Chronological/Development Period(s): Industrial/Urban Dominance  
1870-1930
4. Resource Type(s): Dwelling

Survey No. WI-428

Magi No.

DOE \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

**Maryland Historical Trust**  
**State Historic Sites Inventory Form**

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF  
HISTORIC PROPERTIES

**1. Name** (indicate preferred name)

historic William J. Downing House Downing-Ruark House

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number 400 Park Avenue \_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Salisbury \_\_\_ vicinity of congressional district First

state Maryland county Wicomico

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
___ site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	___ no	___ military	___ other:

**4. Owner of Property** (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Charles and Beverly Kline

street & number 400 Park Avenue telephone no.:

city, town Salisbury state and zip code MD 21801

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Wicomico County Clerk of Court liber 1467

street & number Wicomico County Courthouse folio 845

city, town Salisbury state MD 21801

**6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys**

title

date \_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

Survey No. WI-428

### Condition

☐ excellent  
☒ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☐ moved      date of move \_\_\_\_\_

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The William J. Downing house, also known as the Downing-Ruark house, is located at 400 Park Avenue in the Newtown neighborhood of Salisbury, Wicomico County, Maryland. The two-and-a-half story asymmetrical planned frame house faces east with the principal gable roof oriented on a north/south axis.

Built around 1895-96, the two-and-a-half story, asymmetrically planned frame dwelling rests on a raised brick foundation with an excavated cellar. The exterior is covered with a combination of aluminum siding and fishscale shingles. The various gable roofs are covered with slate that has several decorative highlights. Attached to the southwest corner of the main block is a two-story addition formerly used as a business office.

The east (main) elevation is an asymmetrical facade with a projecting two-and-a-half story pavilion juxtaposed against a recessed wall that contains the principal entrance. The entire first floor is sheltered by a turned post porch enriched with late nineteenth-century sawn and spindle decoration. A turned baluster railing stretches between the porch posts, which have sawn brackets and a spindle gallery under the porch cornice. The porch extends around to shelter the front door as well as the two-and-a-half story wing on the southwest corner. The replacement front door is framed by a transom and sidelights featuring x-shaped muntins. The projecting pavilion is fronted by a two-story bay window topped by a cross-gabled shed roof trimmed with a crown molding. The gable end of the pavilion is pierced by paired attic windows fitted with multi-pane sash within a field of patterned fishscale shingles. Fixed within the peak of the extended eave is an intricately detailed decorative carving. The eaves of the roof are extended with the rafter ends exposed. Rising through the center of the front ell is a tall brick chimney finished with a corbelled cap.

The recessed entrance wall is sheltered by the wraparound porch on the first floor, which is lighted by paired windows fitted with single-pane sash windows that have small clear glass perimeter panes. The second floor is distinguished by a gable-front over the north bay. The gable end, trimmed with extended eaves, is finished with fishscale shingles. Paired windows are fitted with multi-pane upper sash. The peak of the gable roof has an intricately carved decoration. Defining the main roof between the projecting pavilion and the gable front north bay is a gable roofed dormer fitted with multi-pane attic windows, extended eaves, and an intricately carved peak decoration. The dormer is sheathed with fishscale shingles.

The north gable end is marked by a single-story bay window, and the second floor has a single window that lights the second floor.

The south end has a projecting two-story, five-side bay pavilion topped by a gable front roof finished with extended eaves, decorated rafter ends and small brackets under the lower corners of the eaves. Attached to the southwest corner of the main block is a two-and-a-half story office addition finished with similar features as the main block.

## 8. Significance

Survey No. WI-428

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

### Specific dates

### Builder/Architect

check: Applicable Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D  
and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

Lumber merchant William J. Downing financed construction of this intricately detailed Victorian house around 1895-96, shortly after acquiring nearly a half-acre lot from the Gordon H. Toadvine estate trustee, L. Ernest Williams.<sup>1</sup> The Downing house reflects well the architectural animation common to the late nineteenth century. The tee-shaped house has a lively Park Avenue facade with a projecting two-and-a-half story pavilion that extends farther forward with a two-story bay. The main elevation is accentuated with an enriched turned baluster porch that wraps around the uneven main facade and extends across the south side to a two-story office addition. Multiple gables and dormers, sheathed with fishscale shingles, feature decorative brackets and multi-paned windows which enhances the visual exterior interest.

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Downing family ownership of the Park Avenue property continued until 1956, when it was purchased by Elmer F. and Eunice H. Ruark.<sup>3</sup> Elmer F. Ruark served as a mayor of Salisbury for eight years between 1974 and 1982.

<sup>1</sup> Wicomico County Land Record, JTT 17/92, November 23, 1895.

<sup>2</sup> *Salisbury Advertiser*, October 3, 1896.

<sup>3</sup> Wicomico County Land Record, JPTS 415/264, October 24, 1956.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. WI-428

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A 

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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Paul B. Touart, Architectural Historian

organization Private Consultant date 4/13/99

street &amp; number P. O. Box 5 telephone 410-651-1094

city or town Westover state Maryland 21871

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
Shaw House  
21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 269-2438

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
DHCP/DHCD  
100 COMMUNITY PLACE  
CROWNSVILLE, MD 21032-2023  
514-7600

*Salisbury Advertiser*, October 3, 1896

Mr. W. J. Downing has bought of Mr. Randolph Humphreys the remainder of the Morris land lying between Division and Gay streets, back of the property of Mrs. S. A. Graham. Mr. Downing expects to put tenant houses on the lots.

*Salisbury Advertiser*, December 17, 1896

Sharptown History



WI-428

Page 2

William J. Downing House

400 Park Avenue

Salisbury, Wicomico County, Maryland

Chain of title continued

JTT 17/92

L. Ernest Williams, Surviving Trustee

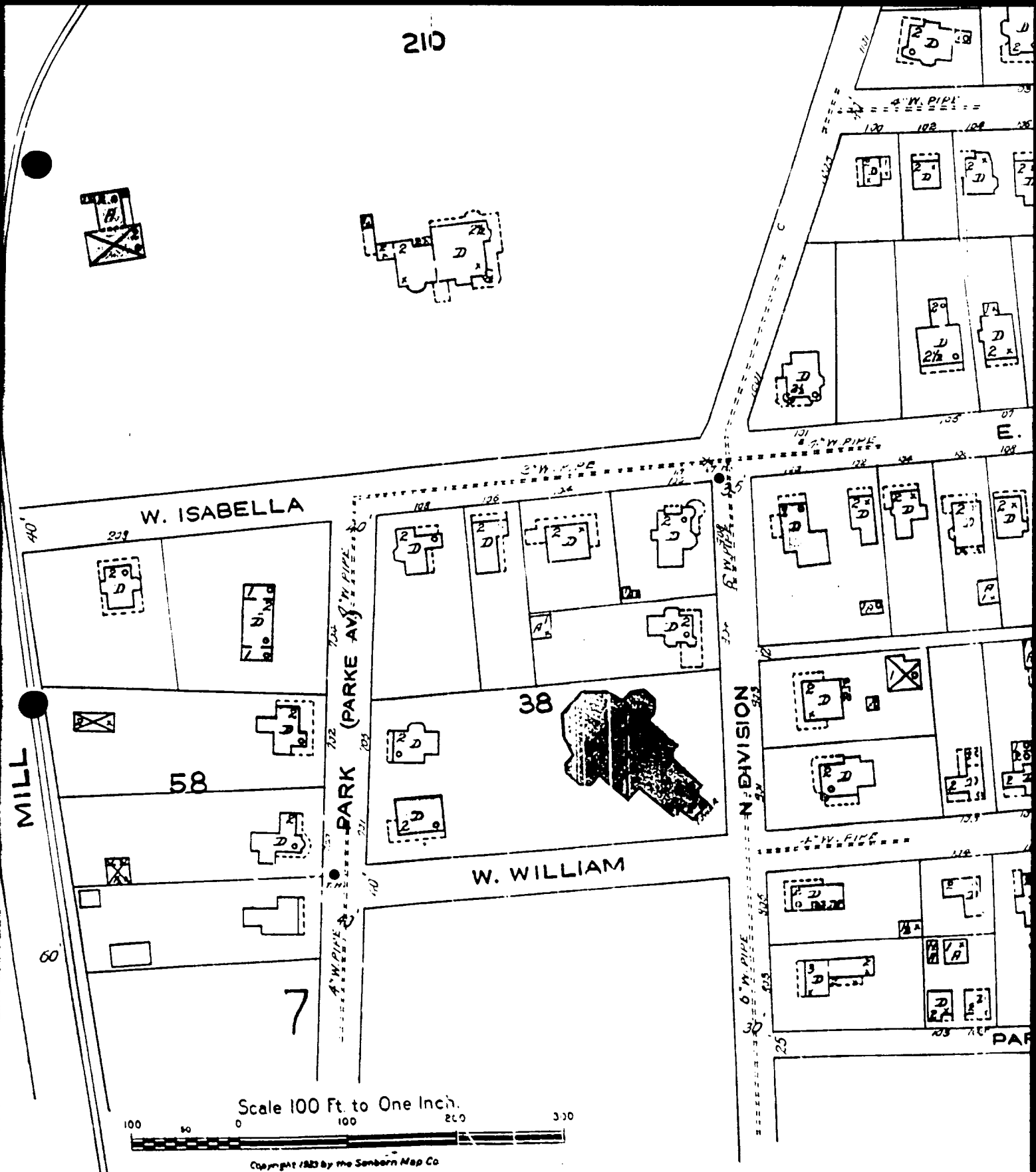
to

11/23/1895

William J. Downing

45/100ths of an acre Lot No. 1 of Division No. 3

Whereas by a certain deed of trust, dated 9/22/1892, by  
Gordon H. Toadvine to Alexander G. Toadvine and L.  
Ernest Williams, whereby the said trustees were vested  
with the authority and power to sell the real estate of the  
said Gordon H. Toadvine



WI-428  
William J. Downing House

Sanborn Insurance Map, 1923

5860 LNW  
(HEBRON)

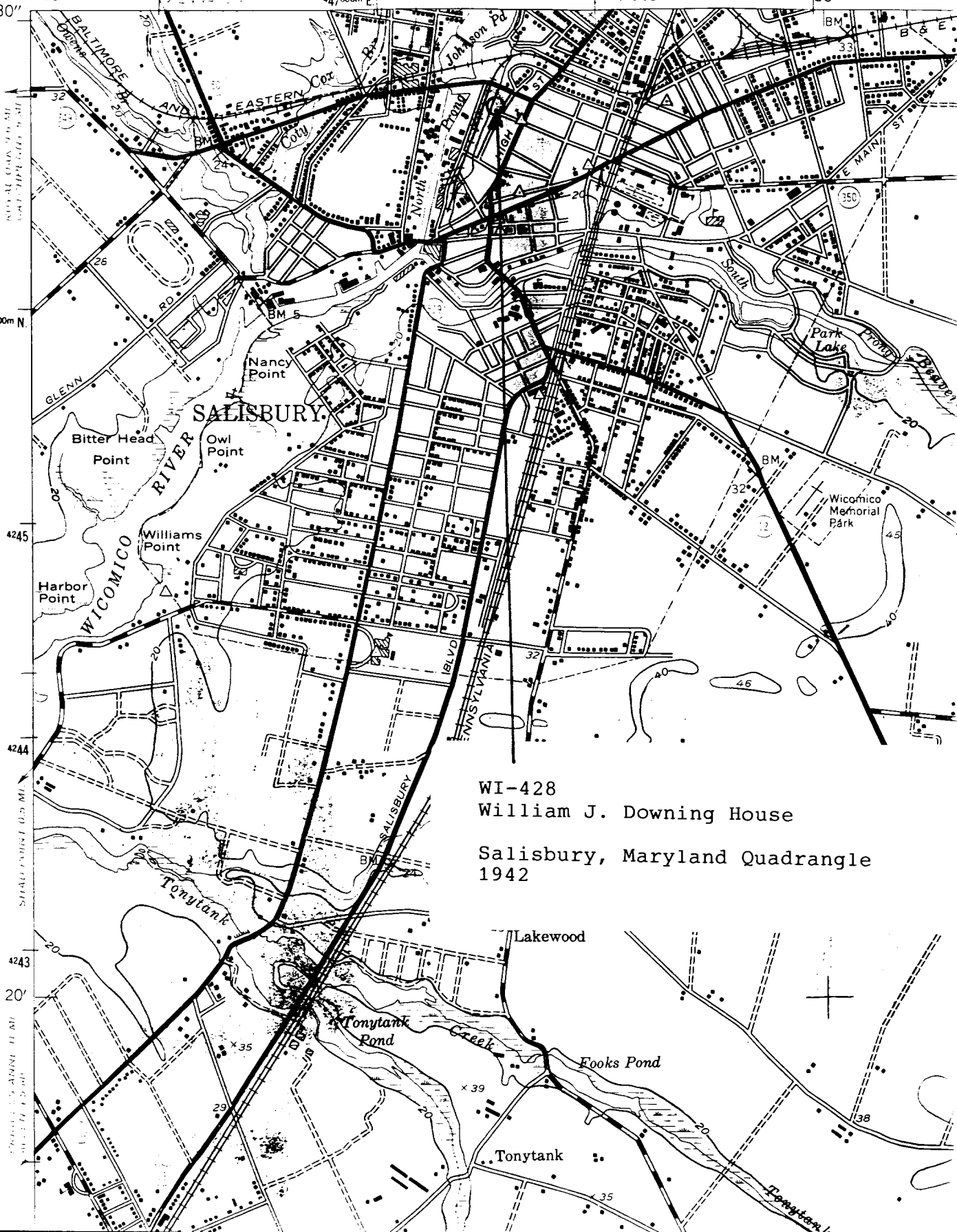
UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

75°37'30"  
38°22'30"

427000m E

35'

4246000m N



WI-428

William J. Downing House

Salisbury, Maryland Quadrangle  
1942







